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| **Text-marking: Elementary** |

***I am a classroom teacher of primary-aged children. What can I do to increase my students’ comprehension?***

Text-marking is an engaging instructional strategy that teachers can use to ensure better comprehension for students in the primary grades. This instructional strategy is an explicit and very effective approach that promotes:

* reading engagement.
* critical thinking.
* formative assessment to inform teachers’ ongoing decision-making.

It generally occurs during the rereading process and requires the use of manipulatives, making complex thinking visible for students to more easily grasp. Much like symbols representing a code, the manipulatives represent the specific purpose for rereading.

***What does a text-marking lesson look like?***

The goal of text-marking is independent student thinking during the reading process. This requires a short series of steps which include teacher demonstration, scaffolding, student practice, and independence.

* Teacher demonstration

Text-marking instruction begins with a demonstration. The teacher models the text-marking process by:

* stating the specific purpose for rereading the text.
* showing students the manipulatives that they will use for rereading.
* explaining what each of the manipulatives represents in their specific purpose for rereading.
* modeling use of the manipulatives with a pre-selected segment of the text that students will be rereading.
* conducting a “think-aloud” to explain the reasoning behind the use of the manipulatives.
* sharing any inferences or conclusions drawn from interacting with the text segment.

**EXAMPLE Text-marking Demonstration**

**(Grade 1)**

* “Boys and girls, today we will reread the story, *Get the Egg.* We will read it again for a different purpose: to focus on characters and setting of the story.” (These concepts were introduced two weeks ago.)
* Miss Mable points to the red and green transparent chips under the document camera for everyone in the class to see on the large screen. “I will use the red chips to help identify characters in the story and the green chips for the setting.”
* Miss Mable points to the text under the document camera. She asks the students to read the first sentence of the story aloud with her: *Kim saw Brad at the tree.*
* “I am looking for words that answer ‘Who? -- Who are the characters in the story?’ ” Miss Mable places one red chip over the word *Kim* and another over the word *Brad*. Miss Mable repeats the question so that the class can read the answers together with her: *Kim* and *Brad.* “Yes, Kim and Brad are characters in this story.”
* “Now I am looking for words that answer ‘Where? -- Where does this story take place?’ I don’t see any words that answer ‘Where?’ but I do see a word that gives me a clue.” Miss Mable places a green chip over the word *tree* and asks the class to read the clue word. “Trees are outside, so I think the setting of the story is outside.

The example demonstration in the text box above clarifies for students what they are expected to know and do. The combination of Miss Mable’s use of the manipulatives and think-aloud made her thinking visible for students, even for the inference about the story’s setting. Even though students may be familiar with text-marking, they will need the teacher to demonstrate the text-marking process again when a new concept and skill is introduced.

* Scaffolding for student practice and independence

After the demonstration, students receive support from the teacher as they begin engaging in the text-marking process together as a class. The teacher continues to think-aloud by asking key questions or statements that guide the text-marking process. During this time, she carefully observes students mark their texts. Where students place their manipulatives on the text indicates whether he or she understands the key concepts in the purpose for rereading. Student use of the manipulatives makes it possible for the teacher to informally assess student comprehension. This information guides teachers in making decisions about how to group and work with students throughout the remainder of the lesson. Students in need of continued support can work with the teacher in small group while others can practice more independently.

**EXAMPLE Scaffolding with Text-marking**

**(Grade 1)**

Miss Mable uses the second sentence of the story to scaffold the class in identifying characters and setting. She has the students sit in pairs, sharing manipulatives and a text. Miss Mable continues to ask each of the key questions (who, where), and the students work with their partner to place a chip on their text as a response. Miss Mable walks around the room to observe the location of the students’ chips. Right away, she can see that several of the students have grasped the concepts. She tells those partners to continue working together. However, there are several others in need of additional explicit support. She quickly organizes these students around the document camera to continue working with them as a group.

***What is important to keep in mind as I plan a text-marking lesson?***

The successful outcome of text-marking depends upon the complexity of the selected purpose for rereading. Text-marking makes thinking visible, and as long as the teacher makes thinking visible, students can take on the challenge of complex tasks. However, not every task and purpose for rereading is complex so it is important for teachers to know how to distinguish an unchallenging task and purpose from one that is complex:

* Unchallenging purpose for reading:

A lesson that has the reader focus on a basic reaction to something in text is more of an unchallenging purpose for reading. For example, lessons asking students to mark sections of text that they like, don’t like, or think is funny are focusing on lower-level tasks because they are not cognitively challenging.

* Complex purpose for reading:

Lessons that assign a complex task promote higher-level thinking. Text-marking tasks that align with lesson objectives can challenge the reader to focus on complex thinking such as inferring a story’s setting, comparing and contrasting, or distinguishing cause from effect.

In planning a text-marking lesson, it is important to couple a complex purpose for reading with the careful use of manipulatives. Examples of a complex purpose for rereading could include any of the following items:

* Details (Mark words in text that answer who, what, where, when, how, why)
* Story structure (Mark transition sections of text – beginning, middle, end of story)
* Different story elements (Mark text words that identify character, setting, story events, problem, solution)
* Sequence (Mark text words that identify events; events that happened in the past, present, and/or future)
* Different character viewpoints (Mark words in text that identify a character’s opinion, etc.)
* Comparison (Mark words in text that identify how words, concepts, characters, or events are the same)
* Contrast (Mark words in text that identify how words or concepts are opposite in meaning; how characters or events are different)
* cause and effect (Mark words in text that identify the cause/effect of an event; change)

***What can I use for manipulatives?***

In the text-marking examples, the manipulatives that Miss Mable used for text-marking were bingo chips; however, there are a variety of different materials that teachers can use. Items such as overhead transparency chips, highlighter tape, or Post-it tabs work well and can be used without damaging the printed text. Also, for text that is consumable such as Xerox copies, teachers can use highlighters for text-marking.

***What are some text-marking examples at other grade levels?***

The example of Miss Mable’s lesson included first grade text. Kindergarten and second grade examples are provided in the text boxes below.

**KINDERGARTEN EXAMPLE**

**Purpose for Rereading:** vocabulary & concept development

**Manipulatives:** Post-it tabs

**Big Book Text: *I Love Animals* Teacher Demonstration/Directions**

by Flora McDonnell

*I love the ducks waddling to the water.* Mark the word/phrase that answers:

* where the ducks are going.
* how the ducks move.

*I love the hens hopping up and down.* Mark the word that:

* means another word for “chickens.”
* tell that the hens were jumping.

*I love the goat racing across the field.* Mark the word/phrase that:

* answers the question “Where?”

*I love the donkey braying “Hee-haw.”* Mark the word that shows the donkey making

a lot of noise.

**SECOND GRADE EXAMPLE**

**Purpose for Rereading:** to identify cause and effect

**Manipulatives:**

* Yellow chip = clue word that signals cause/effect
* Red chip = cause
* Blue chip = effect

**Text: *The Stagecoach Driver* Teacher Demonstration/Directions**

Being a stagecoach driver was a hard job. A driver had to take care of a stagecoach full of people. A stagecoach would sometimes get stuck or tip over because it traveled on muddy trails and rocky roads. And sometimes stagecoaches were robbed.

Charlotte Parkhurst wanted to drive a stagecoach. But women were not allowed, so Charlotte changed her name to Charley. She put on men’s clothes. For 20 years she acted like a man. No one knew her secret.